UNITED NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.109/1146
23 April 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

PITCAIRN

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

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PITCAIRN 1/

I. GENERAL

1. Pitcairn is a Non-Self-Governing Territory in the South Pacific administered by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It comprises four islands situated about midway between Australia and South America at 25 degrees of latitude south and 130 degrees longitude west. Only one of the islands, also know as Pitcairn, is inhabited. It is approximately 3 kilometres long and 1.5 kilometres wide and has a land area of 4.5 square kilometres (452 hectares). Adamstown is the only settlement. The three uninhabited islands are Ducie, Henderson and Oeno.

2. Although there is evidence of previous occupation by Polynesian peoples, Pitcairn was uninhabited when a group of castaways from the HMS Bounty arrived there in January 1790. The group comprised 9 mutineers and 19 Polynesians, and today Pitcairn is inhabited by their descendants. The population has been declining since 1937, when it was approximately 200. According to recent press reports, the population in 1992 was 65, of whom 21 bore the surname Christian, 19 were surnamed Warren and there were 10 Browns. 2/

3. The Pitcairners have their own dialect, a mixture of eighteenth century English and Polynesian, with the former predominating since most of the island's contacts are with English-speaking countries.

II. CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

4. Since the independence of Fiji in 1970, overall responsibility for the Territory has been vested in the United Kingdom High Commissioner to New Zealand, who is also designated Governor of Pitcairn. The Governor, Mr. David Moss, visited the island in 1991. 3/

5. Pitcairners manage their internal affairs through an Island Council consisting of 10 members: the elected Island Magistrate, who serves for a three-year term and acts as Chairman with both executive and judicial powers; three elected councillors, who serve for one-year terms; the Island Secretary, who is a public officer and serves ex officio; one member appointed by the Governor; two members chosen by the elected members; and two non-voting advisory members (one chosen by the Governor and the other by the rest of the Council). The Island Council normally meets in the first week of each month. Liaison between the Governor and the Island Council is conducted by a Commissioner for Pitcairn, usually based in the premises of the British Consulate-General in Auckland.

6. There is an Internal Committee composed of an elected chairman and as many other members as the Island Council chooses to appoint each year. The Committee organizes and implements the public works programme for which all able-bodied men are liable.

7. The Island Court consists of the Island Magistrate and two councillors. Its jurisdiction is limited to offences against the Island Code that are

committed on Pitcairn or within its territorial waters by residents of the Territory, and to civil actions. In instances where no local law is applicable, the law of the United Kingdom is applied so far as circumstances permit. There is provision for appeal to the Supreme Court of Pitcairn, which the Governor has the power to constitute and which has jurisdiction in cases outside the competence of the Island Court. The Island Court is rarely required to sit. Only two cases which resulted in a conviction and a fine have been tried before the Court in the past 20 years. 4/

Consideration by the General Assembly

8. In a statement to the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly on 23 October 1991, 5/ the representative of the United Kingdom stated that respect for the wishes of the inhabitants of the dependent Territories remained the guiding principle of his Government's policy. The United Kingdom Government continued to take seriously its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations to develop self-government in the British dependent Territories and to ensure that their constitutional frameworks continued to meet the wishes and aspirations of the people. His Government considered it wrong to equate self-determination solely with independence and to forget that other options were available.

9. On 25 November 1992, in its decision 47/412 on the question of Pitcairn, which was adopted by consensus, the General Assembly reaffirmed the inalienable right of the people of Pitcairn to self-determination in conformity with the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, which fully applied to the Territory. The Assembly further reaffirmed the responsibility of the administering Power to promote the economic and social development of the Territory and urged the administering Power to continue to respect the very individual lifestyle that the people of the Territory had chosen and to preserve, promote and protect it.

III. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

10. The economy of Pitcairn is based on subsistence fishing and gardening and the sale of handicrafts and postage stamps. Since the population has been relatively stable, land use has varied little in recent years. Apart from the Adamstown settlement, which occupies approximately 24 hectares, land is classified as suitable for gardens or arable farming (117 hectares), forest (77 hectares) and non-arable cliffs and rock ledges (121 hectares). Land is family-owned and usually passed on to successive generations, but the law allows for leasehold arrangements and "borrow" land. The Lands and Administration of Estates Ordinance provides, inter alia, for ownership and registration of land.

11. During 1990/91, Pitcairn had total revenues of $NZ 1,112,600 6/ and expenditures of $NZ 1,015,100, resulting in a surplus of $NZ 97,500.

12. Pitcairn's main sources of income were the sale of postage stamps, as well as interest and dividends. Stamp sales increased to $NZ 529,000 ($NZ 487,100 in 1989/90) whereas interest and dividends declined to $NZ 273,600 ($NZ 290,400 in 1989/90). Other sources of revenue included coin sales amounting to $NZ 52,300 and miscellaneous revenue totalling $NZ 257,700.

13. According to press reports, British scientists have discovered large mineral deposits of manganese and iron within the Territory's 200-mile exclusive economic zone. A marine biologist with the research team, which was mapping the Pacific seabed, stated that further research would be needed to establish the extent of the mineral deposits. 7/

14. The Island Council plays the major role in identifying areas requiring expenditure of public funds and in determining priorities. The main expenditures during 1990/91 were as follows (corresponding figures for 1989/90 are given in parentheses): administration, $NZ 339,800 ($NZ 413,800); postal operations, $NZ 305,000 ($NZ 232,000); public works and marine operations, $NZ 195,650 ($NZ 201,600); education, $NZ 83,750 ($NZ 64,400); medical services, $NZ 51,600 ($NZ 72,100); broadcasting, $NZ 30,700 ($NZ 38,600); and agriculture, $NZ 8,600 ($NZ 9,400).

15. Most imports are for home use, consisting mainly of cereals, eggs, fats, meats, milk, sugar, machinery, lubricating oil and building materials. Exports consist of handicrafts, fruits and vegetables, which are sold mainly to passing vessels. There are no customs tariffs in the Territory.

16. Responsibility for agriculture is vested in the Head Forester, who has two part-time assistants. Livestock consists of some 100 goats and poultry. A tractor with a driver is available for hire to assist in garden cultivation. Seeds, fertilizers and pesticides are available at cost from the forestry department. Bees provide small quantities of honey for domestic consumption; their pollination of tree and garden crops has increased production.

17. Subsistence fishing is one of the main occupations of the islanders. Under the Fisheries Zone Ordinance of 1980, Pitcairn declared a 200-mile fisheries zone around the island in the hope of increasing its income by selling fishing licences. However, owing to Pitcairn's remoteness, very few agreements have been concluded so far. During the past four years, only three fishing licences were issued to foreign fishing vessels.

18. The most common species of fish caught around Pitcairn are rock cod, grey mullet, red snapper and mackerel. Lobsters and other shellfish are also caught and sold to passing ships.

19. Electricity is supplied by government-owned diesel generators. Two 50-KVA generators supply power for public lighting (including navigational lights) as well as private homes in Adamstown. In addition, the Government operates two smaller generators (9.25 KVA and 8 KVA) to meet school and telecommunications requirements.

20. Pitcairn is surrounded by very rough seas and has no sheltered bay for anchorage. Frequent difficulties encountered in unloading cargo and passengers led the administering Power to construct a jetty at Bounty Bay in 1977.

21. Vessels of one shipping company make approximately four scheduled calls per year on their run between New Zealand and Panama. Other cargo vessels make unscheduled calls.

22. In the past, several projects, including the construction of an airstrip for light aircraft, have been examined by the administering Power in order to improve Pitcairn's communications with the outside world. However, after weighing the high costs of construction and maintenance of a runway against its limited use, it was decided that an airstrip could not be justified. 8/

23. There are approximately 6.4 kilometres of dirt roads on Pitcairn which are maintained by the community. In 1989, there were about 30 vehicles on the island, mostly three- and four-wheeled motor cycles. 9/ Recent press reports state that wheelbarrows, the principal means of transporting firewood, have been replaced by three- or four-wheeled motor cycles with attached trailers. 2/

24. Postal facilities are available. In late 1992, press reports stated that the radio-telephone and telegraph service linking the Territory with the outside world had been replaced by a satellite system operated by the Telecom Corporation of New Zealand Ltd. The firm provides modern telephone, facsimile and telex services which will give Pitcairners greater access to the outside world. 10/ There are local telephone connections between private houses, the school and some public buildings.

IV. SOCIAL CONDITIONS

25. According to previous reports of the administering Power, there are no social problems of a racial or cultural nature on Pitcairn. Women and men have equal status; there are personal and corporate freedoms and Pitcairn's legislation meets the requirements of United Nations conventions on human rights. Since most Pitcairners are members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church which forbids excessive socializing and alcohol, social problems besetting other island communities are rare on Pitcairn. 11/

26. The population of the Territory is self-employed. Allowances and wages are paid to members of the community who participate in local government activities and who perform communal services. Payment for casual work, usually for the local administration, is $NZ 3.25 per hour.

27. The quality of housing varies. Homes built or renovated since 1984, when a subsidized building scheme was introduced, have concrete or particle board floors, and indoor bathrooms and kitchens.

28. A consumer's cooperative society, established in 1967, owns the only shop in the Territory and provides basic foodstuffs and staples and a limited supply of clothing, footwear, hardware, kitchenware, stationery and toiletries.

29. During the period under review, one doctor served as Medical Officer in the Territory for four months; for the remainder of the year, a registered nurse was responsible for health care. Medical advice and assistance may also be obtained from surgeons on passing ships. There is a well-equipped government clinic run by a registered nurse in cooperation with a church organization. Dental officers visit the Territory occasionally.

30. The Government meets the cost of medical supplies and drugs. If medical treatment is required outside Pitcairn, compassionate grants or loans are

available from public funds. There are no prevalent diseases, although a small number of people are receiving treatment for diabetes. Most of the population has been immunized against poliomyelitis. A widow's benefit scheme was introduced in 1983/84. Pensions are paid to persons who are 65 years of age and over.

V. EDUCATIONAL CONDITIONS

31. There is one school operated and financed by the Government. Education is free and attendance is compulsory for all children between 5 and 15 years of age. In 1990/91, there were eight girls and five boys attending classes. Instruction is in English and is based on the New Zealand standard curriculum. Post-primary education is conducted at the school by correspondence courses arranged through the New Zealand Department of Education. During 1990, two post-primary students attended school in New Zealand at the Government's expense.

32. By arrangement with the International Division of the New Zealand Department of Education, a trained teacher (education officer) is seconded to the Territory for two-year terms. Internal examinations are conducted by the education officer, and the Governor may prescribe external examinations and arrange for inspections.

33. The school premises comprise two classrooms, a handicrafts workshop and a cloakroom, all set around a recreation ground. School equipment includes a film projector, video and television, record player, piano, typewriters, photocopier, tape recorder, sewing machines, sports equipment and a variety of tools for technical training. The school also has a small library.

Notes

1/ The information contained in this paper has been derived from published reports and from information transmitted to the Secretary-General by the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under Article 73 e of the Charter of the United Nations on 31 July 1991 for the year ending 31 March 1991.

2/ Pacific Magazine (Honolulu), January/February 1993.

3/ New Zealand Herald (Auckland), 3 January 1992.

4/ A Guide to Pitcairn (published by the Government of the Islands of Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno, Auckland, 1990), p. 50.

5/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-sixth Session, Fourth Committee, 11th meeting, para. 9.

6/ The local currency, the Pitcairn dollar, is at par with the New Zealand dollar; during 1990/91, $NZ 1.00 was equivalent to approximately US$ 0.55.

7/ The Times (London), 13 March 1992.

8/ A/AC.109/977, para. 19.

9/ A Guide to Pitcairn (published by the Government of the Islands of Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno, Auckland, 1990), p. 45.

10/ Pacific Magazine (Honolulu), January/February 1993; New Zealand Herald (Auckland), 3 January 1992.

11/ Reuters dispatch, Wellington, 31 December 1991.